

SUMMARY OF WRITTEN COMMENTS RECEIVED FOR THE PROPOSED DUCK CREEK ACQUISITION

The Department received a total of 15 letters or comment sheets. Of these, 9 were in support of acquiring the site and 6 were opposed.

Reasons for support were:

- * The riparian wildlife habitat of the Yellowstone River needs protection/restoration wherever possible.
- * Proper site development, maintenance and patrolling will preclude noise, pollution and vandalism problems.
- * Any access for hunting or fishing close to Billings is extremely valuable. More sites are needed, and this replaces one lost.
- * The site is at a good intermediate location.
- * The site would relieve a crowded, dangerous condition created by illegal parking along the Duck Creek Bridge.
- * Having another launch site will improve boating safety and potential for rescue.
- * The river belongs to all the people, and denying access is not a reasonable means of regulating undesirable activities.
- * The site will enhance access to the Yellowstone River, which is a vital part of the quality lifestyle in Billings.

Reasons for opposition were:

- * Loud noise from jet boats and jet skis will disrupt wildlife, reduce aesthetics, and cause loss of land values for neighbors.
- * The area is small acreage-residential and should remain so.
- * Game fish populations are low, and more fishing pressure would cause declines.
- * Use continues at Duck Creek Bridge despite posting, and parking is challenged only when travel on the road is impeded.
- * Current access at Laurel and Billings should be adequate.

- * Access at the mouth of the Clarks Fork or Coulson Park should be explored first.
- * A water access will accelerate bank erosion in the area.
- * Trespass, vandalism and weeds will increase.
- * Noise, fire hazards and litter will accompany parties.

RESPONSES TO CONCERNS BY CATEGORY FOR PROPOSED DUCK CREEK ACQUISITION

USE CONTINUES AT DUCK CREEK BRIDGE

Some anglers continue to park along Duck Creek Road on both sides of the Yellowstone River and on either side of the road. This use, however, ignores the county's signs prohibiting parking. Although some parking remains unchallenged, it is illegal. Also, access for launching and taking out over the steep, rip-rapped bank is difficult.

CURRENT ACCESS IS ADEQUATE NEAR BILLINGS

The present distance between ramps for the floating public is 21.1 miles, which is double what most care to float in one day. The Department has been approached for more access in the past, particularly in the proposed area.

SEEK ACCESS AT BLM LAND ON THE CLARKS FORK

The Clarks Fork site would be only 2.5 miles downstream from the Riverside Park ramp and 18.6 miles upstream from East Bridge FAS. A Clarks Fork site would not adequately reduce the current float distance.

THE RIVER CHANNEL IS SHIFTING TO THE NORTH

The floods of '96 and '97 improved the channel on the south side of the river where the site would be located, and the bank is stable in this area. The Yellowstone River is by nature an active river and we can't predict what may happen in 10 years. We need the access now while we have a chance to buy it. We can always trade it or dispose of it if it no longer serves the purpose for which we purchased it.

MORE PRESSURE WILL CAUSE THE ALREADY POOR FISHERY TO DECLINE

Most anglers using this area pursue rainbow trout, brown trout, and burbot (ling). Estimates from 1987-88 were 250 to 300 trout per mile, with most from 11 to 16 inches long, and some brown trout over 20 inches. The burbot ranged from eight to 33 inches long. Declines in fishing quality would be addressed through more restrictive limits.

WILDLIFE HABITAT WILL BE LOST AND WILDLIFE DISTURBED

Habitat will be protected if FWP purchases this property in contrast to a homeowner who would put in a house and a groomed lawn. Most of the site will remain undisturbed under current primitive development guidelines. Another EA will be prepared, and the public will again comment, regarding development plans.

The Yellowstone Chapter of the Audubon Society has volunteered to establish a baseline of neotropical bird use at the site, and to evaluate impacts of future development.

PUBLIC ACCESS WILL BRING TRESPASS, VANDALISM, THEFT, PARTIES, FIRES, ETC.

The site would be fenced with interior barriers to direct use. The site could be designated as day use only and gated. Patrols by wardens and sheriffs deputies would further deter unauthorized use. Fires can be prohibited or limited to certain areas. Again, these issues would be addressed in detail preceding eventual development of the site.

JET BOAT/JET SKI USE AND NOISE

Jet boats and skis launching now at Riverside park and East Bridge FAS can reach this area now in a matter of minutes. Acquiring this site is not likely to increase general motorboat use in the Billings area; it will increase regardless. The only means to control this use now is if there is a safety hazard created by speed or numbers of users.

Limiting the site to non-motorized boats ignores a large segment of potential users in this section of the Yellowstone River.

ACCELERATED EROSION

The site may need some protection from erosion caused by runoff and the shifting river. Erosion caused by motor boats should be minor compared to annual runoff.

WEEDS

Weed management is a regular and important part of maintaining all Department access sites.